

1.04.2008 - A Look Ahead

As we celebrated the beginning of a new year, many of us resolved to better ourselves in some way, whether it be by losing those holiday pounds, spending more time with our families, or giving more to our communities. It is fitting, too, that we look ahead to our 2008 priorities and ways to better West Virginia.

I believe the outlook for 2008 is bright with potential for West Virginia. This year, for my part, I will continue to advance an agenda built on West Virginia values that will honor our unique culture and heritage as well as strengthen the foundation for economic development in our state.

Coal continues to be a mainstay of West Virginia's economy and a vital part of America's energy portfolio. I will keep doing all that I can to promote a cleaner, more efficient, and strategically wise use of coal. Fostering a viable domestic coal-to-liquids (CTL) industry, for example, will be high on my "to do" list in 2008.

Investing in CTL is extremely important if we are to free ourselves from an overdependence on foreign oil, a fact which even the Air Force has recognized and is working vigorously to ensure that its entire fleet of planes is CTL compatible by 2011.

I intend to keep working with the Defense Department to help provide long-term contracting options for the Air Force, so that it can enter into fuel-purchase contracts for as much as 25 years. Such long-term contracts would be beneficial to ensuring a steady market for the fuel in years to come.

As Vice Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I will continue to oversee federal transportation policy. In 2008, the Committee will begin work on the 2009 Federal Highway Bill and continue working to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), two bills vital to the development of southern West Virginia.

Our rural airports are

economic engines for the communities they serve and the FAA legislation, on which I will be working, is integral to their success. I will work to ensure that our rural airports remain competitive and receive the federal investments they need to prosper.

Construction of safer more modern highways continues to be one of the greatest needs for our region and one of my highest priorities in Congress. In 2008, I will continue to seek funding for southern West Virginia's important transportation infrastructure projects, including the King Coal Highway, Route 10, the Coalfields Expressway, the Shawnee Parkway, the Heartland Corridor, the New River Parkway, and the Z-Way in Beckley.

It is important, however, that the State be a full partner with us in these efforts and that the Statehouse devote the full measure of authorized federal funds as well as badly needed state funds to building these roads. I will continue to work with transportation officials in Charleston to solidify their commitment to funding for these projects, which will bring a defined economic benefit to the region.

In the area of technology, I will continue to build on the successes of the second year of the Connected Technology Corridors (CTC) Initiative, which I established in 2005. The CTC focuses on enabling economic growth in southern West Virginia through the development and expansion of high-speed telecommunications technology and other infrastructure, as well as training and marketing services, needed to allow businesses to grow and communities to compete in the 21st century global marketplace.

Thus far, this public-private venture has established 490,000 square feet of technology buildings and 3,365 acres of business/technology parks that are in place, under construction, or in design, with more in the works for 2008.

It is also rolling out broadband and DSL all over the Third District. Last February, the CTC announced the expansion of broadband service to over 320 residents of the Meadow Bridge community in Fayette County. In August, Verizon, a CTC partner, announced the agreement between the non-profit Connected Nation and Verizon to help expand high speed internet in Boone County and map out a strategic approach to providing broadband across the state.

Last December, we opened the Rahall Technology

Center at The Woodlands in the
Pinecrest Business and Technology Park in Beckley.
The Rahall Technology
Center at Concord University,
which houses a state-of-the-art auditorium, teleconferencing capability, and
the only virtual reality system in the state, will be dedicated in February,
2008. Both facilities will play an integral role in bringing southern West Virginia's communities,
businesses, educational institutions, and entrepreneurs together to create jobs
and sustain economic growth in future years.

These are just a few
examples of priorities I envision for West
Virginia in the coming year. I am delighted to join so many dedicated,
selfless leaders working throughout southern West Virginia to help advance these
initiatives. A spirit of optimism is flowing through the Mountain State
and I am confident that greater things await us. As the new year gets under
way, I look forward to continuing my service to southern West
Virginia and to each of you as your Representative in Washington.

Best wishes for a joyous and
prosperous 2008.